

Well, the American people are asking: Why not simply compromise on a clean extension of the payroll tax credit for 160 million workers and unemployment insurance? Why not ensure that 160 million hardworking families can benefit from the average of \$1,000 they will receive from the payroll tax credit—again, right into the economy.

Yesterday the Republican majority decided they would rather risk raising taxes and digging into the pockets of families all across this country. Well, Mr. Speaker, not even Scrooge could do what we saw on the floor yesterday. In the end, our holiday humbugs—the Grinch, Mr. Scrooge, and even Mr. Potter—learned that there is redemption. It's time for our House Republicans to do the same. I urge the majority to instead bring to the floor a sensible and thoughtful piece of legislation to extend unemployment compensation and the payroll tax credit.

REPUBLICAN AGENDA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. FUDGE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. FUDGE. Mr. Speaker, after a year of attempts to eliminate Medicare and obstruct any kind of jobs bill, the Republican agenda is clear: eliminate the deficit at any cost, including at the expense of our most vulnerable, while adversely impacting our economic recovery.

More than 1.6 million American children were homeless at some point in 2010. These are children under the age of 18 living in emergency shelters or in shared housing, and many are living on the street. Now, in 2011, the number of homeless children continues to increase. There are more homeless children today than after the natural disasters of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The recession's economic devastation has left 1 in 45 children homeless, millions of Americans are out of work, and we have pushed unemployment rates to levels not seen in decades.

We continue to see poverty soar. In 2010, nearly one in six Americans was living in poverty. As poverty surged to its highest level since 1993, median household incomes declined, which is why it is maddening to me that we in Congress can't agree or even come to a point where we can agree to compromise on policies that will help struggling Americans.

In the 49 weeks since the Republicans took control of this House they have failed to pass a single bill to encourage job growth. They pledged to focus on economic recovery, but they have failed to deliver. I have sponsored four jobs bills in the last 6 months, but none of them has been brought up for a vote. What the majority has done is try to advance their own political agenda. Their priority is clear: eliminate the deficit at any cost on the backs of the most vulnerable.

This year, Republicans proposed a budget that would privatize Medicare

and make Medicaid a block grant, sacrificing care for our seniors, our sick, and our poor. The Republican budget slashed more than \$6 trillion—with a “t”—over the next decade from Medicaid, SNAP, Medicare, and many other programs supporting low- and middle-income Americans. The majority suggests these drastic changes while leaving in place tax cuts for the wealthiest and \$40 billion in Big Oil tax loopholes.

The majority's budget would devastate poor communities and middle class Americans. It pushes seniors into the hands of private insurance companies and forces them to pay more out-of-pocket expenses. What we need is a bold approach, Mr. Speaker, to maintaining these programs rather than finding ways to defund or derail them.

Almost 6 million workers have been unemployed for a year or more in this country, so we know there is a strong need to extend unemployment insurance. What we've seen this week makes me skeptical. Here we are at the end of one of the most unproductive congressional sessions we've had in recent history. In this end of the year drama, Republicans play the role of the Grinch who stole Christmas.

Yesterday, the House passed a bill that slashes unemployment insurance by 40 weeks in the States that are hardest hit, including my own home State of Ohio. If signed into law, beneficiaries without a high school degree would be denied insurance unless they use the benefits we're giving them to pay for getting their GED. The bill also allows States to force recipients to take drug tests.

In 2010, unemployment benefits kept 3.2 million Americans—including nearly 1 million children—from falling into poverty. I don't even want to imagine the magnitude of the problem if we fail to extend unemployment insurance now.

During this holiday season more than ever, Americans feel there is no way out. Last week, a woman in Texas, who was originally from the State of Ohio, killed herself and shot her two children because they were denied SNAP benefits. One of those children has died. Mr. Speaker, this is desperation, homelessness at its worst.

THE END OF THE IRAQ WAR: WELCOMED BUT TRAGICALLY OVERDUE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, since the spring of 2004 I've stood here in this very spot 415 times to call for an end to foreign wars and the start of a new, smarter approach to national security. In most of those speeches my tone has been one of insistence and beseeching. Seldom have I been able to echo good news or declare a sense of accomplishment, but Mr. Speaker, today is different. As the President will reaffirm

in a speech at Fort Bragg today—and it moves me almost beyond words to say this—the war in Iraq is finally over.

After 105 excruciating months, after so much heartbreak and despair, after so many shameful episodes—such as the “Mission Accomplished” banner, Abu Ghraib, the outing of Valerie Plame, and so much more—our troops are finally coming home from Iraq, all of them.

Much credit goes to President Obama for making good on his promise. When he was sworn into office, there were 142,000 U.S. servicemembers deployed to Iraq; by the time the calendar turns in 2012, there will be zero; zero.

□ 1050

But this day would not have come unless some very brave people had spoken up for peace at a time when the polls and the conventional wisdom said that President Bush and his Iraq policy were unassailable.

I've been proud to work in particular with my friends, Congresswoman BARBARA LEE and Congresswoman MAXINE WATERS, in establishing the Out of Iraq Caucus. Many of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle stood shoulder to shoulder with us, including our late friend, Jack Murtha, who's opposition to the war represented a major turning point in the Iraq debate.

Of course, no one displayed more courage than the heroic men and women who served in Iraq with honor and selflessness. They present the best our Nation has to offer. I only wish that their elected leaders had served them better over the last decade.

But, Mr. Speaker, we must be careful. We must be careful about turning this into an occasion of triumph or celebration. The end of the Iraq War is welcome, but tragically, overdue. Too much has been lost in precious American blood, in badly needed public treasure, and in our moral core as a Nation. The end of this war comes too late for nearly 4,500 Americans whose parents, spouses, children, and friends will miss them desperately this holiday season and every other day of the year.

Many thousands more are home from Iraq with broken minds and bodies, with scars they will carry for the rest of their days. We must keep our promise to them to provide the benefits that they so need and deserve.

I don't know how we atone for the deaths of thousands upon thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians. Our military occupation in Iraq is over, but our bilateral engagement with Iraq most certainly will go on. There is still plenty of human need in Iraq, and we must have an obligation to help alleviate that.

It is critical that the United States be a peaceful and constructive partner with Iraq, investing in development, providing the civilian support that will empower its people, and strengthening its democratic institutions. Now is the moment. Now, more than ever, we must move to a smarter security in Iraq.